

### NEGRO SLAVERY AND THE MORAL LAW.

Arts, science, and history assure us negro slavery existed in Egypt long before the Hebrew exodus, which event carried that institution through the wilderness into the promised land, with a moral code devised for reformation of manners. Those greatly err who regard the children of Israel Moses led to have been in a position similar to the negro slaves of the southern States of North America.

The Hebrew patriarchs were colonists from Asia, living on the eastern border of Egypt, as our predecessors from Europe first settled the eastern shores of the great American continent.

The ancient Hebrews were of the same Asiatic race with the Egyptians, as our ancestors with the people of Britain, France, Germany, Spain, and other civilized nations in Europe.

The Israelites owned slaves, probably African negroes, from the time of Abraham, who received his servants from the Egyptian.

Among the monumental paintings, sculptures, and devices of most remote date we discover the peculiar national traits of African tribes in a condition of bondage.

With savage nations anciently, an indiscriminate destruction of prisoners of war often prevailed. *One improvement* upon this early custom of general slaughter was adopted, namely: the more humane practice of selling such prisoners *for slaves*, without discrimination of race, sex, or color. The reformed code of the Mosaic period evidently designed to *express a distinction between races*, because there are special laws to regulate the treatment of free Hebrews, and of servants or slaves of "the stranger" other than Hebrew. Slavery is known to have existed among the wild and savage tribes of Africa from very early record. Its condition was sometimes *ameliorated* by a traffic with other people, in which gold, ivory and slaves, were exchanged for merchandise—as now.

The ancient Hebrews *and their negro servants* were taxed, burdened, and oppressed by the Egyptian government, like the North American colonists and their slave property by Great Britain. Similar *parallels* of condition may be discovered throughout the revolutionary history of both people, with relation to the *primary* introduction of negro servitude and the ultimate independence of masters of a different race, often aided in their contests by servants in arms. Colonial people of ancient as in modern times were disposed to reform remote opinions, and to change certain manners of life. They sought relief from a bondage of arbitrary laws, idle ceremonies, ridiculous expenditures, and extravagant ideas; in place of which practical truths were suggested, founded upon "principles" which still maintain a modified efficacy. Each people emigrated to a distant country, proposing to worship Almighty God in a plain and faithful manner, with liberty to govern themselves by a moral system better suited to their temporal welfare and condition than some more ancient one.

The people in both instances carried with them many arts and much information, acquired by intercourse with other pre-existing nations.

"The mixed multitude" which accompanied the Hebrews out of Egypt certainly included African slaves, well described elsewhere in translation as "*careless Ethiopians*"—originally

purchased or stolen from neighboring tribes imported by the Egyptians, and transferred to the Hebrews for money.

A distinction in races was inserted by special provision of the moral laws, afterward closely copied into the Constitution of these United States by men well instructed both in natural and revealed truths.

Among early precepts delivered to the Hebrews after their independence were rules for the *humane treatment* of servants of every description, plainly prescribed for hirelings of the poor of their own people, the Hebrew race, and for servants "of the stranger" or slaves obtained by purchase *alone* from people or nations of other descent. A considerate delicacy or gentleness of expression in regard to servants, characterizes Hebrew law, clearly imitated by those who framed the Constitution of the United States upon a similar model.

The word "*slave*" does not appear in either instrument of writing!

An arrangement of our Constitution for a proportioned valuation according to respective numbers decides that "*three-fifths*" of the negro slave population be estimated for a representation in Congress under the quiet denomination of "*all other persons—than free.*"

Three distinct races of men are prominently alluded to in the American Constitution of government:

1st. Free persons: *whites*, "*including* those bound to service for a *term of years*," as many worthy emigrants from Europe formerly were.

2d. "*Indians*," native *red* men, "*not taxed.*"

3d. "*All other persons not free*;" that is to say, those of *black, negro* or African blood.

These precise distinctions are seen to have prevailed among the population of the earliest periods in Egypt, plainly expressed in features, forms, and colors among descriptive monuments which still remain near the Nile.

The reason for such discriminate circumspection appears evident in Hebrew law, and is clearly recorded in the preamble of our Constitution, prepared for the general government of these United States, which commences with the phrase—"We, the people," never designed to include the negro *in full*, nor the untaxed Indian population, in such a general representation!

"We, the people, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquillity, provide for the common defence, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain."

Such were the honorable dispositions of our patriotic

fathers when negro slavery prevailed throughout the land by definite laws, according to arrangements *insisted* upon by the government of Great Britain, aided by eastern ship-owners, who monopolized the profits of the external slave trade, and whose descendants now enjoy *the products*—in many other forms of investment!

“To steal and sell a man” was distinctly forbidden, and capitally punished by moral law; because *such method of supply* encouraged acts obviously hostile to the reformed code of manners—then newly introduced.

“The slave who ran from his master” for refuge, among the Hebrews evidently referred to one from any neighboring savage tribe. He was not permitted to be returned to a barbarous people! But no authority exists in moral law to seduce a slave from a Hebrew master living under the obligations of the same political government. On the contrary, covetousness, murder, theft, falsehood, and inhumanity were ordered to be strictly repressed, in every particular, without exception of color, latitude, or property.

The institution of slavery, *then*, was not regarded an immorality, but was corrected in its details, like other existent practices, by the gradual operation of a system of manners admirably calculated to benefit every condition of social society if sincerely and honestly acted upon—in life. The same moral commands are now held to be the basis of all existing civilization among us and others.

By the consent of slave traders and slave owners in the United States, the external traffic was wisely but gradually abolished, because known to incite war, plunder, and avarice among the native tribes of Africa. It was deemed just and right to avoid an encouragement of such trade—among such a people. The intermingling of *new* savage negroes with those partially civilized among us may also have been regarded dangerous to domestic tranquillity, according to an experience elsewhere.

The entire control of the internal institution of slavery was discreetly reserved to the people of the several States to regulate and control, upon principles of justice and humanity, in the same manner as by the moral law offered to an ancient nation where a similar modified system of slavery prevailed.

Servants and hirelings of the Hebrews, slaves or “strangers” of other people, are enumerated in two prominent enactments of the Decalogue, exhibiting practical precepts for common action in life.

In the fourth command "a day of rest and refreshment," *after* six days of toil and labor, was generously appointed for the benefit of *all* members of families, sententiously including men and women servants, "strangers," and *working cattle*. We presume this ordinance was somewhat of a novelty in legislation at that period. We cannot consent to believe the law was designed to promote a superstitious observance at any time.

By the tenth command property of varied description—houses, servants of all kinds, and *cattle*—were protected from every covetous or envious disposition, as well as from fraud, outrage, and violence, by other separately expressed ordinances. We cannot avoid an inference that a condition of society then existed very similar in its impulses and character to that we now experience.

"The savage maxim" of *retaliation in kind* was attempted to be repressed by this honorable law in a peculiar but very intelligible manner to us now.

"If a man"—a master, we presume—in hasty or reckless passion, "struck out the eye," or even "the tooth of a servant," male or female, *freedom was the compensation, required by law from the master in satisfaction to the servant*, in order to repress the violent hand by fear of losing all legal right in such valuable and allowed property.

This was surely *the practical sense* of the Mosaic expression, which employed a conspicuous comparison, drawn from an existing "proverb," *known among savages* with revengeful manners, then as now. An imitation of such custom was intended to be repressed—by strictly forbidding it.

Can we doubt, from the plain tenor of this specimen of ancient moral philosophy, there was a design to correct ruthless practices in life by "principles of humanity," modified by the opinions and customs of that age? Such merciful and just reformatations in ancient manners evince an advance in civilization founded upon the perception of practical and useful truths.

Our fathers of the revolution were well instructed in such liberal opinions upon which they established a constitution of government, including a condition of domestic servitude; they desired such to be mildly and judiciously exercised *in accordance* with similar dictation and experience.

"Truth, mercy, and justice" were anciently described to be the attributes of a God—"the same to-day, yesterday, and forever."

Our fathers were taught to believe that laws of humanity were revealed to the hearts of men by Him. Human acts

of arbitrary vengeance, of *self-imposed* violence, treachery, and deception, however qualified or intended, do not accord with His moral law, though men sometimes attempt to *pervert* ancient writing to serve special selfish purposes "in vain," though not without guilt.

The inclinations men are forbidden to indulge and ordered to control by mental influences are treated in moral science as impulsive—sometimes, even, as instinctive—but *always to be repressed* by a cultivated intelligence, if we may judge from references to knowledge incessantly alluded to as drawn from experience of evil results, by habits well understood to have prevailed among pre-existent or coeval people.

An equitable law for the *compensation of injuries* was recognized as a social necessity, rather than proposed to invite feelings of vindictive retaliation and vengeance.

The individual was encouraged by moral law *to forgive*, and to hope for pardon; while the community was authorized to punish, after most careful and cautious proofs, but upon a system of unprecedented moderation!

By tempering State laws for the treatment of slaves by equitable principles of humanity as heretofore, our enemies will strive in vain to provoke our servants to violent acts against their masters, which attempts are seen to recoil upon the murderous and reckless incendiaries.

The general character of our slaves of African descent throughout the southern States of North America offers evidence of considerate and liberal training, notwithstanding the assertions of fanciful writers who unfairly employ *exceptions* as the rule of common action. Valuable habits of industry and order taught to slaves of wild African blood result from the moral cultivation of generous masters and mistresses, falsely denounced as tyrants. Such gradual though tedious instruction, with constant sense of responsibility, adds to the temporal welfare and contentedness of the slave.

Contrasted with any other portion of the land, there is "little complaining in *our streets!*" The well-taught servants of African descent often exhibit more true independence of character, absolute honesty in practice, good faith and feeling in their conduct, *than many who defame us*, while surrounded by objects of their own race deserving much more charitable aid and support than they receive, however great the necessitous demand may be. An institution of negro slavery exists among us in the south founded upon the same principles inculcated by ancient moral law we have all been taught to regard with reverence.

It is on this account, we are led to believe, that the good sense and intelligence of the people of the southern States need not yield to unusual excitement in consequence of the dogmatic severities, dyspeptic humors, or hysterical assumptions of speculative and fanatic abolitionists, of any pretension, profession, denomination, sex, or color. Such treasonable and prejudiced minds *must be restrained, to repress their offensive arts and actions* by every lawful process and proper constitutional interdict.

A secession of the south from an Union of the States, though strongly desired by some who denounce the Constitution of our government as favorable to negro slavery, does not appear to be *a remedy* for illegal interferences. Yet resistance to such aggression has become a necessity and a duty, both in the north and at the south. So long as we remain just and merciful to our servants, true to the economic principles established to rule the moral conduct of man *in this respect* we need not to fear those who threaten us in the name of One whose decrees they insolently and blasphemously profess to carry out by every mischievous act and device, equally objected to in an anciently written moral Decalogue and our liberal Constitution of general government.

The successful maintenance of a modified slavery of the negro, co-existent with freedom and instruction of the white race, has been sufficiently proven to the calm, considerate, and honest inquirer : while the restless interference of bigotry or frenzy, ill-will or ill-health, of ignorance, fanaticism, and conceit, present results disastrous to *all the races*, whenever such pretensions have been encouraged or submitted to.

The benefits masters and slaves have *mutually* received by combinations of their industry and abilities may excite the jealousy and envy of some who revile us for the permanence of an institution they or their progenitors confessedly introduced, and were honestly compensated for—by our ancestors.

We may safely defy those who claim authority from the Bible, or from any just law, to excite slaves to rob and murder their masters and mistresses !

Those who promote such evil practice meet their due reward in a providential reaction.